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Reviews

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Saint as Seer: Structure and Style in Ælfric's Life of St Cuthbert

Hiroshi Ogawa

Ælfric's life of St Cuthbert, which is the tenth item in the Second Series of *Catholic Homilies* (*Depositio Sancti Cuthberhti Episcopi*; the *Dictionary of Old English* short title *ÆCHom* II, 10),[1] has been a focus of Ælfrician scholarship chiefly owing to the position it holds in the development of the homilist's prose style. It is the first work in Ælfric's outstanding career as a vernacular prose writer in which he experiments in a sustained manner with the new style of rhythmical prose for which he was to become a renowned master in his subsequent writing. In J. C. Pope's words, this prose style 'emerges first in certain homilies of Ælfric's Second Series. […] The Cuthbert homily, which occurs first in the set, may be among the earliest in date of composition and certainly exhibits an interesting mixture.'[2] Pope's full analysis of the prose in the Cuthbert homily, both in relation to the homilist's 'ordinary prose', which precedes it, and his rhythmical prose in its mature form, shows clearly how important the homily is as an experimental stage. This importance, however, should not draw attention away from other dimensions of the work that are equally important in considering Ælfric's prose style. In a seminal study of Ælfric's hagiographies in the *Catholic Homilies*, M. R. Godden has persuasively argued that the homilist's experimentation with rhythmical prose is part of the emergence of a new pattern that clearly points to his 'change of heart' about hagiography. While his earlier saints' lives such as those of John the Apostle and Peter and Paul use a narrative that is interspersed with passages where Ælfric the homilist has almost replaced Ælfric the narrator, later lives within the *Catholic Homilies* and those in the *Lives of Saints* for which they set the pattern 'concentrate on narrative rather than preaching and debate' and 'use the universalizing hagiographic diction and employ the balanced, succinct, rhythmical style'.[3] Godden convincingly shows that the Cuthbert homily is one of these later saints' lives. This

[1] *Ælfric's Catholic Homilies: The Second Series*, ed. by Malcolm Godden, Early English Text Society, s. s. 5 (London: Oxford University Press, 1979), pp. 81–91.

[2] *Homilies of Ælfric: A Supplementary Collection*, ed. by John C. Pope, Early English Text Society, o. s. 259–60, 2 vols (London: Oxford University Press, 1967–68), I, 113.

[3] M. R. Godden, 'Experiments in Genre: The Saints' Lives in Ælfric's *Catholic Homilies*', in *Holy Men and Holy Women: Old English Prose Saints' Lives and Their Contexts*, ed. by Paul E. Szarmach (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1996), pp. 261–87 (p. 280). As for the earlier saints' lives, I have examined the one on Peter and Paul in 'Hagiography in Homily — Theme and Style in Ælfric's Two-Part Homily on SS Peter and Paul', *Review of English Studies*, 61 (2010), 167–87. On the homily on John the Apostle, see Godden, 'Experiments in Genre', pp. 266–69.

perspective suggests the importance of considering the Cuthbert homily in a different light by discussing its stylistic features in relation to the style of hagiographical narrative, rather than as a problem of prose style *per se*. In particular, it stimulates a reconsideration of the homily focusing on Ælfric's narrative technique in it: how, apart from experimenting with rhythmical prose, does he adapt the hagiographical material to the larger end of a preaching homily and its overall structure, when he has abandoned the homiletic discourse in the relevant writing? Following this line of approach, I shall examine the full details of the homily's narrative and discuss how the style enhances its structure in a way that attests to the working of a conscious stylist.

In considering the structure and style of Ælfric's Cuthbert homily, we must first understand clearly the preceding works he used as sources for creating a new life of the saint. Here, the situation is rather complicated. There are three Latin *Vitae* of the saint: the prose *Vita* by an anonymous monk of Lindisfarne, Venerable Bede's *Vita* in verse, and his own expansion of it in prose, all written not long after the saint's death,[4] with part of this last work later included in a few chapters of the *Historia ecclesiastica* (Bk IV, chs. 27–32). Ælfric seems to have had all of these available in one way or another for his use, and which of them he used as his source has been a matter of dispute. However, it is now generally agreed that Bede's metrical *Vita* is Ælfric's main source, which he supplements mostly with Bede's prose *Vita* and occasionally with the anonymous *Vita* and the *Historia*. Thus, in his introductory note to the homily Godden speaks of Ælfric's 'primary use of Bede's verse Life', adding 'that the parallels with the anonymous Life […] are clearly there, and that there are also definite borrowings from Bede's prose Life for the material that is not reproduced in the *Historia*'[5] — a view which is partly based on the evidence adduced by Gordon Whatley.[6] The conclusion the two scholars share and the details Godden gives of the closest parallels between the *Vitae* and individual passages from Ælfric's Life serve as the point of departure for my analysis of this Old English homily.

Godden goes on in his introductory note to ask about Ælfric's homily and its sources: 'how much did the different structures and stylistic techniques of the three lives affect his own writing?'[7] Godden does not dwell on this problem but mentions Bede's verse Life as the main influence upon Ælfric's structuring:

[4] The short titles for the three are, respectively, *VCA*, *VCM*, and *VCP*, as commonly used. The editions of the *Vitae* used in this study are *Bedas metrische Vita Sancti Cuthberti*, ed. by Werner Jaager (Leipzig: Mayer & Müller, 1935), and *Two Lives of Saint Cuthbert*, ed. and trans. by Bertram Colgrave (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1940). The translations of the passages from the two prose *Vitae* cited below are Colgrave's in this latter book.

[5] *Ælfric's Catholic Homilies: Introduction, Commentary and Glossary*, ed. by Malcolm Godden, Early English Text Society, s. s. 18 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), pp. 412–13.

[6] E. Gordon Whatley and others, 'Acta Sanctorum', in *Abbo of Fleury, Abbo of Saint-Germain-des-Prés, and Acta Sanctorum, Sources of Anglo-Saxon Literary Culture I*, ed. by F. M. Biggs and others (Kalamazoo, MI: Western Michigan University, 2001), pp. 22–486 (p. 159). On Ælfric's sources, see also Mechthild Gretsch, *Ælfric and the Cult of Saints in Late Anglo-Saxon England*, Cambridge Studies in Anglo-Saxon England, 34 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), pp. 101–7. Gretsch gives another dimension to the study of the Cuthbert homily by considering it and its sources in the context of the cult of the saint which developed in England in the few centuries before the eleventh century. She argues that the homily shows Ælfric 'specifically aiming to promote the cult' (p. 101). How this aspect would have affected the structure and style of his homily is a problem I cannot consider in this study.

[7] Godden, *Commentary*, p. 413.

> Bede's verse Life is written in 46 chapters which focus on individual miracles and omit most of the context of events […] As Lapidge says, 'it is part of Bede's purpose to remove the episodes of Cuthbert's life from the temporal and local and to situate them in a timeless, placeless framework'. […] Ælfric clearly follows the model of Bede's verse Life as much as possible. He focuses on the miracles and gives very little sense of the context and place.[8]

This apparent parallelism prompts further questions about Ælfric's homily and its method. If such is the purpose and framework of the work that Ælfric follows as his model, how does he recast these aims in his own work as he transforms its narrative (and that of the other *Vitae*) into a homily? How much does he alter the structure of his model for his own purpose? What are the narrative and stylistic techniques he deploys to achieve his purpose? My contention in the sections that follow is that Ælfric shows a clear sense of structure designed to emphasize Cuthbert's position as one of God's elect. He places the main emphasis on the role of the saint as a seer and, in doing so, represents the saint in the early life as foreshadowing the kindly bishop that he is predestined to be, while often rearranging the events and details of events found in the *Vitae* in a way which uncovers a certain pattern of development in the hagiography. These points will become clear as we analyse his homily in comparison with the narratives in the *Vitae*.[9]

II

As Godden notes in the quotation above, of the three preceding lives of Cuthbert, the one that served as Ælfric's main source uses little overall structure in telling the story of the saint. This feature of the verse Life has been repeatedly pointed out by previous scholars. For example, Werner Jaager asserts: 'das Gedicht zeigt in seinem Aufbau keine Steigerung' ('the poem shows no climax in its structure').[10] Michael Lapidge's reference to the poem's 'timeless, placeless framework' (as quoted by Godden; see above) indicates a similar opinion, as does his concluding remark that 'it is wrong to look to this poem for narrative history of any sort'.[11] This point has been discussed more recently in greater detail by Carole E. Newlands. Comparing the verse Life with the other *Vitae*, Newlands argues convincingly that while Bede's prose life 'is developmental in its structure', his verse Life essentially 'sees the saint's career in terms of accretion, not development'. In this, it is more like the anonymous Life, which 'illustrates this given fact [of Cuthbert's predestined sainthood] through its paratactic structuring of a series of wondrous events'. 'The poetic Cuthbert', she concludes, '[…] is essentially a static character who lives out his predestined holiness', in a treatment that 'views Cuthbert's sanctity as preordained and Cuthbert himself as mature in faith almost from the beginning'.[12] Newlands also notes that the anonymous Life 'opens by establishing the notion of predestination. Bede's metrical vita elaborates on this concept by explaining at the start of this [first] episode that Christ singled out Cuthbert and guided him in his early years to

[8] Godden,*Commentary*, p. 414.

[9] Obviously, the alliterative style and other poetic features are also an important part of Ælfric's stylistic techniques in this homily, but these cannot be considered in this study except in passing.

[10] Jaager, *Bedas metrische Vita*, p. 16.

[11] Michael Lapidge, 'Bede's Metrical *Vita S. Cuthberti*', in *St Cuthbert, His Cult and His Community to AD 1200*, ed. by G. Bonner, D. Rollason and C. Stancliffe (Woodbridge: Boydell, 1989), pp. 77–93 (p. 93).

[12] Carole E. Newlands, 'Bede and Images of Saint Cuthbert', *Traditio*, 52 (1997), 73–109 (pp. 82, 84 and 91).

ensure his reception in heaven'.[13] Drawing on the representation in the *Vitae*, Ælfric phrases this notion of special election as *his gecorenan* 'God's chosen one', as he refers to Cuthbert in the first episode and the final doxology; see below and the final section.

As in Bede, from the beginning of Ælfric's homily, Cuthbert is described as a saint with preordained holiness. To be noted in this connection is the passage Ælfric adds prior to the first episode as the opening of the homily:

> *ÆCHom* II, 10.1 Cuthberhtus se halga biscop scinende on manegum geearnungum and healicum geðincðum. on heofenan rice mid þam ælmihtigum scyppende on ecere blisse rixiende wuldrað.
>
> (Cuthbert the holy bishop, shining with many merits and high honours, reigning in the kingdom of heaven with the Almighty Creator in everlasting blessing, lives in glory.)

Here, Ælfric gives a striking initial characterization of his protagonist saint, depicting him as a living bishop in heaven (with the present tense *wuldrað*) rather than, say, an ignorant child (with a verb in the narrative past tense); he also portrays Cuthbert as reigning with God ('mid þam ælmihtigum scyppende […] rixiende'), emphasizing his oneness with God. These features, both unparalleled in any of the hagiographical homilies in the *Catholic Homilies*,[14] uniquely set the general tone of the homily, foreshadowing the nature of the subsequent narrative.

The notion of Cuthbert's preordained sanctity is best seen, as Newlands suggests, in the first episode, in which the eight-year-old Cuthbert is reprimanded by a God-sent boy of three years for behaving like other boys and not in a way worthy of a future bishop (ll. 7–27). Here, the closest parallel is the passage in the verse Life, and Ælfric on the whole follows it closely but makes some notable changes.[15] For instance, he makes the boy tell Cuthbert, described as 'his gecorenan' (l. 10): 'geðeod þe to gode. ðe ðe to biscope his folce geceas. þam ðu scealt heofonan rices infær geopenian' ('attach yourself to God, who has chosen you as a bishop for his people, to whom you shall open the entrance of the kingdom of heaven'; ll. 18–19), where the poetic *infans* says more plainly: 'Quid te […] / Quem deus […] sacravit / Praeficiens populis, caeli quibus atria pandas?' ('why […] you whom God has consecrated, setting you over the people for whom you would lay open the dwelling of heaven?'; c. 1, 63–65). With the distinctive use of particularizing phrases such as 'to biscope […] geceas' and 'heofonan rices infær', Ælfric represents Cuthbert's special election by God and his preordained bishopric more pointedly and with more specific details, while at the same time he uses *scealt* to represent the bishopric as unambiguously prophetic. The verse Life is vaguer about Cuthbert's bishopric and uses the subjunctive present *pandas* to refer to this future career. This direction of change has in fact been initiated in the immediately preceding reference to Cuthbert's behaviour being unworthy of a bishop; Ælfric rephrases it as a general truth using the third person pronoun ('ne gedafenað biscope þæt he beo on dædum folces mannum gelic'; 'it is not befitting to a bishop that he should be like the common people in deeds'; ll. 16–17)) and not as being directly relevant to young Cuthbert, as in the two prose *Vitae*, which use the second

[13] Newlands, 'Bede and Images', p. 85.

[14] With the single exception of the Cuthbert homily, Ælfric always opens his relevant homilies by referring either to the feast of his protagonist saint or the Latin author whose work is his source.

[15] B. A. Blokhuis is right to call Ælfric's lines 14–16 'an almost exact copy of the words in [*VCM*]' ('Bede and Ælfric: The Sources of the Homily on St Cuthbert', in *Beda Venerabilis: Historian, Monk and Northumbrian*, ed. by L. A. J. R. Houwen and A. A. MacDonald (Groningen: Egbert Forsten, 1996), pp. 107–38 (p. 115)). But she

person pronoun (*VCA* 64.26–27; *VCP* 156.30–158.1);[16] both prose versions also address the young Cuthbert literally as 'bishop' (*VCA* 64.25 'episcope'; *VCP* 156.30 'antistes'). All this shows that Ælfric's representation of Cuthbert's preordained bishopric is more factual, both in the specific details it gives and its unambiguous reference to the future career.

To register his emphasis, Ælfric also rearranges the details of the story.[17] Thus, in the verse Life (as in the other *Vitae*) the God-sent boy's first words of admonition are disregarded and, when given soothing kisses by young Cuthbert and told to stop his wailings, he renews his admonition with the prophecy of a bishopric for Cuthbert. Ælfric instead places the prophesying at the beginning of the boy's admonition, as quoted above, launching straightaway into the heart of the episode without even mentioning at this point Cuthbert's actions which prompted it in Bede. The significance of this rearrangement becomes clearer as we go on to find the kisses focused on at the end of the story, where we read that Cuthbert's playmates tried to soothe the child in vain, until at last 'cuðberhtus hit mid arfæstum cossum gegladode' ('Cuthbert gladdened him with kindly kisses'; ll. 24–25).[18] This last description is a close rendering of Bede's in the verse Life ('hunc pia complexum Cuthbertus ad oscula mulcet'; 'Cuthbert embraces this boy and soothes him with kindly kisses'; c. 1, 60). However, lifted from its original context, the description is endowed with a new force in Ælfric's representation, depicting the climax of the episode: young Cuthbert now makes the boy happy by giving *arfæstum* kisses — not unlike a holy man, an analogy the word *arfæstum* seems to imply. The word probably means here, as it usually does in the *Catholic Homilies*,[19] 'virtuous, honourable' rather than 'kind' (as Thorpe translates it).[20] All this suggests that Ælfric represents Cuthbert as an understanding youth (unlike Cuthbert in the anonymous Life, who did not clearly understand (64.27–66.1)) who is envisaged as a kindly bishop that he is prophesied to be. Hence perhaps Ælfric concluding the episode with a note on the effect of the event, saying that the youth for his part 'syððan […] on healicere stæððignysse symle ðurhwunode' ('afterwards […] always remained in intense steadiness'; ll. 26–27, with *healicere*, literally meaning 'high', possibly also suggesting holiness). This final remark, absent in the verse Life, is derived from Bede's prose Life, where the youth 'stabilior […] animoque adolescentior existere coepit' ('began […] to be steadier and more mature in mind'; 158.6–7). What Newlands says with respect to the representation in this version applies to Ælfric's as well: 'Cuthbert the chastised becomes the comforter, and the roles of the prophetic

does not take cognizance of the alteration I discuss below.

16 The verse Life is closer to Ælfric: 'Fas erit aut vulgi antistes similabitur actis?' ('Or will it be proper that the bishop should resemble the deeds of the common people?'; c. 1, 67). For analyses and interpretations of this episode in the *Vitae*, see Newlands, 'Bede and Images', pp. 84–86; Eric Knibbs, 'Exegetical Hagiography: Bede's Prose *Vita Sancti Cuthberti*', *Revue Bénédictine*, 114 (2004), 233–52 (pp. 240–41).

17 For details, see Godden, *Commentary*, p. 416, note on lines 7–27.

18 On the word *arfæstum*, see below.

19 Ælfric uses the adjective fourteen times in the *Catholic Homilies*, mostly in reference to God and holy saints or with such nouns as *weorc*, *dæd* and *geleafa*. The *Dictionary of Old English* (s.v. *arfæst*) distinguishes two senses with some subdivision: '1. pious, dutiful; virtuous, honourable; 2. merciful, compassionate; kind, benevolent, gracious', citing under 1 three examples from the *Catholic Homilies*; on the other hand, the one example of the second sense from Ælfric refers to God. Blokhuis ('Bede and Ælfric', p. 115) translates the word as 'honourable'.

20 *The Homilies of the Anglo-Saxon Church: The First Part, Containing the Sermones Catholici or Homilies of Ælfric*, ed. by Benjamin Thorpe, 2 vols (London: Ælfric Society, 1844–46; repr. New York: Johnson Reprint, 1971), II, 135.

child and the schoolboy are dramatically reversed.'[21] Ælfric intensifies the reversal with his rearrangement and vocabulary.

The kindly, virtuous bishop which the young Cuthbert is predestined to become may be seen at different points in the subsequent narrative, but most prominently in the well-known passage where he, while still a monk, prays at night on the shores (ll. 74–94). Part of the interest of the passage lies in its diction, including 'on ðam sealtan brymme' ('in the salt sea'; l. 75) and 'on fealwun ceosle' ('on the yellow sand'; l. 85).[22] But more important, in terms of the figure of a future bishop, is the use of distinct patterns of syntax whereby Ælfric gives a contrastive treatment to the kindliness that the holy youth shows to the two different parties surrounding him — the sea-animals, on one hand, coming from the depths, obediently drying and warming him with their fur and breath and asking for his blessing, and, on the other, a spy monk who is curious about his nocturnal walks and watches him. The first half describes Cuthbert and the seals using largely parallel clauses marked by two shared features, which are the adverb *syððan* and a participial construction:

> *ÆCHom* II, 10.78 Ða dyde cuþberhtus swa his gewuna wæs. sang his gebedu on sælicere yðe. standende oð þone swyran. and syððan his cneowa on ðam ceosle gebigde. astrehtum handbredum to heofenlicum rodore; Efne ða comon twegen seolas of sælicum grunde. and hi mid heora flyse his fet drygdon. and mid heora blæde his leoma beðedon. and siððan mid gebeacne his bletsunge bædon. licgende æt his foton on fealwun ceosle; Þa cuðberhtus ða sælican nytenu on sund asende. mid soðre bletsunge. and on merigenlicere tide mynster gesohte.
>
> (Then Cuthbert did as was his habit, sang his prayers in the sea-wave, standing up to the neck, and afterwards bent his knees on the sand, with palms outstretched to the heavenly firmament. Behold, then came two seals from the sea-ground, and they dried his feet with their fur and warmed his limbs with their breath, and afterwards begged his blessing by a sign, lying at his feet on the yellow sand. Then Cuthbert sent the sea-animals to the sea with a true blessing, and on the morning tide he sought the monastery.)

Two additional details, both shared by the saint and the seals — the word order *ða* VS ('Ða dyde cuþberhtus […] Efne ða comon twegen seolas […]') and the word *bletsung* ('hi […] his bletsunge bædon […] cuðberhtus […] asende. mid soðre bletsunge') — intensify the parallelism and the affinity between the man and the animals which the parallelism enhances. The parallelism is then broken in the next sentence by the word order VS without an initial

[21] Newlands, 'Bede and Images', p. 86.

[22] For a discussion of these phrases, see Godden, 'Experiments in Genre', p. 279. Godden defines the former phrase as 'poetic' in 'both phrasing and vocabulary' and the adjective in the latter phrase as 'a colorful dramatic language'. The presence of *sea*-terms of similar phrasing ('sælicere yðe', 'sælicum grunde', and 'sælican nytenu' (ll. 79–85)) and the selective use of *fealwe* (for it does not occur with the noun *ceosl* when the latter first appears in this passage (l. 80)) seem to confirm this view. The phrase *sealt brym* also occurs in lines 164 and 189. It may also be relevant to note that the adjective *fealwe* corresponds to *fealu* in Bede's poem, which Lapidge ('Bede's Metrical *Vita*', p. 91, n. 46) translates as 'golden'. For the view that the adjectives in the two phrases mentioned above have 'a generalising force', see Peter Clemoes, 'Ælfric', in *Continuations and Beginnings: Studies in Old English Literature*, ed. by E. G. Stanley (London: Nelson, 1966), pp. 176–209 (p. 206). On poetic words in Ælfric, see further Thomas A. Bredehoft, 'Ælfric and Late Old English Verse', *Anglo-Saxon England*, 33 (2004), 77–107 (pp. 97–105), and the same author's *Authors, Audiences, and Old English Verse* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2009), pp. 154–59. Bredehoft does not discuss the passage from the Cuthbert homily under consideration. However, on the evidence of poetic words and other features such as alliteration and rhythmical scheme and also metrical pointing on the manuscript, he argues that Ælfric wrote the Cuthbert homily and other rhythmical works not as 'rhythmical prose' but as verse. See further n. 32.

adverb, which announces the transition to the second half of the story: 'wearð þa se munuc micclum afyrht' ('then the monk became much frightened'; l. 87).[23] There are no more parallel clauses but disparate types of description for the two parties now put in focus — a rapid succession of parataxis for the monk who becomes ill for his sin of curiosity and begs the saint to have mercy ('wearð þa se munuc […] hine geeadmette […] biddende […]'; 'the monk then became […], prostrated himself […], praying […]'; ll. 87–90) and direct speech for the saint who agrees to do so ('ic ðinum gedwylde dearnunge miltsige'; 'I will secretly pardon your error'; ll. 90–91), albeit conditionally. The two descriptions are linked by a word they share — the verb *miltsian* (as opposed to the preceding *bletsung* for the seals), which emphasizes at once the monk's difference from the seals and the holy youth's kindliness which transcends that difference. The condition Cuthbert imposes on the monk — that he should tell nothing of what has happened until he (Cuthbert) dies — foreshadows the words he is later to give to an abbess when prophesying his own election as bishop (ll. 237–38; see p. 31). Cuthbert's reference to his own death is couched in generalized terms with homiletic echoes ('oð þæt min sawul heonon siðige. of andwerdum life gelaðod to heofonan'; 'until my soul journeys hence, invited from the present life to heaven'; ll. 92–93), expanding the verse Life's factual 'quousque / Decedam mundo' ('until I depart from the earth'; c. 8, 243–44). When Ælfric concludes the passage, he does so by representing young Cuthbert as a saint who is powerful enough to heal a man by prayer and remit his sin ('Cuðberhtus ða mid gebede his sceaweres seocnysse gehælde. and his fyrwites ganges gylt forgeaf'; 'Cuthbert then healed his observer's illness by prayer and forgave the guilt of his walk of curiosity'; ll. 93–94). That Ælfric here again slightly expands the verse Life ('tum prece languorem pellit culpamque relaxat'; 'then he drives away the illness by prayer and remits the sin'; c. 8, 247) and uses the homiletic *gehælde* for Bede's plain *pellit* suggests his insistence on the figural significance of the event.

III

The representation of Cuthbert as a preordained bishop and its implication of a powerful saint is a feature that sustains the homily from its opening to the final doxology (on the doxology, see the final section). However, within this larger pattern, Ælfric's approach to the individual events he narrates varies. I would argue that Ælfric deploys varying narrative patterns as his protagonist develops from a learning youth to a seer and a bishop. Through this narrative technique and the thematic use of linguistic details we shall discuss later, Ælfric registers his sense of the structure of the saint's *vita*. His Life is not static but has a structure of its own which requires detailed analysis. Alex I. Jones says that Ælfric's text has 'a very different structure from Bede's' and 'falls very clearly into three parts'.[24] But he says this in terms of what the protagonist is and does — he is first 'the recipient of grace', then 'contends with the devil', and finally 'is spiritual leader, seer, and thaumaturge'.[25] What is more important is to examine the narrative and stylistic techniques Ælfric deploys to give thematic expression to this development.

We may begin with one of the earliest episodes in the life of young Cuthbert. Immediately following the God-sent boy's prophecy, this episode (ll. 28–47) recalls how an angel of God

[23] On this use of the VS word order to mark a transition or turning-point in narratives, see Bruce Mitchell, *Old English Syntax*, 2 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985), II, 976 (§3933).

[24] Alex I. Jones, 'Ælfric's Life of Saint Cuthbert', *Parergon*, n. s., 10 (1992), 35–43 (p. 40).

[25] Jones, 'Ælfric's Life', p. 40.

healed Cuthbert's injured leg. Ælfric first calls the heavenly visitor 'sum arwurðe ridda' ('a worthy horse-rider'; l. 32) but soon identifies him as an angel ('ðam engle', l. 35), repeating this narrative explanatory phrase again ('þæs engles', l. 44) and reinforcing it with a reference to 'his halwendum handum' ('his healing hands'; l. 40). This authorial intervention at once emphasizes Cuthbert's ignorance at that time and the knowledge he will soon acquire. In fact, he does learn the truth at the end of the event, where Ælfric explains that Cuthbert 'ongeat þæt god þurh his engel hine geneosode' ('realized that God had visited him through his angel'; ll. 45–46). As Godden has pointed out, this firm statement 'gives the agency to God more clearly than in the *Vitae*.'[26] By placing such emphasis on the direct agency of God, Ælfric registers his point that the young Cuthbert foreshadows what he is predestined to become — the holy man who has a special status with God.

The same pattern is also sustained in another early episode, which is the first episode after Cuthbert becomes a monk (ll. 59–73). As the guest-master of the monastery, he one day welcomes a visitor, whom Ælfric 'identifies […] as an angel at the outset'.[27] But young Cuthbert does not become aware of the truth until later when, on coming back from outside to the room, he finds the visitor gone:

> *ÆCHom* II, 10.66 he ne gemette nænne cuman ða ða he inn com. ac lagon ðry heofenlice hlafas on lilian beorhtnysse scinende. and on hrosan bræðe stymende. and on swæcce swettran þonne beona hunig; Þa sceawode se halga cuðberhtus on ðam snawe gehwær. hwyder se cuma siðigende ferde. ac ða ða he nane fotswaðe on þam snawe ne geseah. ða ongeat he þæt se cuma wæs engel and na mann. se ðe ðone heofenlican fodan him brohte. and ðæs eorðlican ne rohte.
>
> (He did not find any visitor when he came in, but there lay three heavenly loaves, shining with the lily's brightness and giving off the rose's fragrance and sweeter in taste than bees' honey. Then the holy Cuthbert looked everywhere in the snow to see where the visitor had gone travelling, but when he saw no foot-traces in the snow, then he realized that the visitor was not a man but an angel, who had brought him the heavenly food and did not care for the earthly food.)

Cuthbert is here shown to be guided to the truth by the loaves left in the room and the snow on the ground outside. The white colour the two nouns both imply is obviously symbolic of the heavenly visitor, as it is in the 'snawhwitum horse' ('snow-white horse'; l. 32) on which the visitor arrives in the previous episode, and to that degree it ties in with the preceding authorial identification. The symbolism is reinforced by a comparison of the loaves to a lily and two other things with similar associations.[28] For all this and the epithet 'heavenly' for the loaves, Ælfric had the model in Bede's verse and prose Lives (*VCM* c. 7, 208–9, *VCP* 178.6–7; *VCM* and *VCP* c. 7, chapter heading). However, Ælfric gives a final touch of his own to the narrative flow by rearranging the details. In Bede's two versions, Cuthbert first looks out to find no footprints in the snow and only then (and two sentences later in the prose Life) discovers the loaves in front of him; there is apparently little narrative development between the two discoveries. Ælfric not only reverses this order but makes the one discovery immediately consequent on the other, producing a sharper account of the climax. The account

[26] Godden, *Commentary*, p. 417, note on lines 44–47.

[27] Godden, *Commentary*, p. 418, note on lines 59–73.

[28] Ælfric also uses rhyme in this passage ('scinende […] stymende' and 'him brohte […] ne rohte'); see Pope, *Homilies of Ælfric*, I, 115 and Godden, *Commentary*, p. 419, note on lines 59–73. For a third example, a sequence of five rhyming words in lines 232–34, see p. 31.

ends, as in the previous episode, with the statement that Cuthbert now realized the truth ('ða ongeat he').

The narrative pattern used to tell the stories of young Cuthbert soon begins to give way to a new mode. This new pattern first emerges in the third episode of Cuthbert's life as a monk, in the account of how Cuthbert was fed miraculously by an eagle while travelling and preaching with a companion (ll. 97–112). In an earlier similar story of a miraculous gift of food (ll. 51–58), Cuthbert does not know about the gift until it suddenly appears before him. In contrast, in the eagle episode as Ælfric recounts it Cuthbert foresees the gift from God before it arrives. To render the point clearly, Ælfric 'places the eagle a little earlier in the story than any of the *Vitae*'.[29] Whereas in all the *Vitae* Cuthbert had started talking about the meal of the day with his companion before the eagle came into his sight, Ælfric describes Cuthbert as seeing the eagle first and then starting the conversation about the meal. It appears as if, in Ælfric's narrative, the sight of the eagle prompted Cuthbert to recall the precedent of Elijah's raven (which in fact the saint quotes as he explains his trust in God to his companion) and to think about the meal and foresee the solution for the problem that he is going to be favoured with. All the *Vitae*, too, describe Cuthbert as trusting in God's favour, but only rather vaguely and before he sees the bird (*VCA* 86.3–4; *VCM* c. 10, 298–301; *VCP* 196.5–7). To that extent, Ælfric has woven subtle hints of Cuthbert's foreknowledge into the narrative. But he does not say anything explicitly about it (as Bede does, saying 'praescius ipse futuri' ('himself prescient of the future'; *VCM* c. 10, 293) at the outset), thereby rendering the foreknowledge all the more effective when it is finally revealed. Whereas in the two earlier events discussed above, Cuthbert is innocent while we are given the truth, he now foresees God's favour before we read about it in the eagle episode: Cuthbert has now become a seer. This development is of course evident in all of the *Vitae*. But Ælfric's use of the new pattern (and the rearrangement of narrative material upon which it hinges) at this point emphasizes his sense of the protagonist's development.

The emergence of this new narrative pattern is reinforced by the next miracle that Ælfric recounts, which describes how Cuthbert, foreseeing an illusion of fire conjured by the devil, warns the people to whom he is preaching (ll. 113–26). As before, Ælfric makes a change in the narrative details. All the *Vitae* describe Cuthbert as evidently foreseeing the devil's illusion and warning the crowd against it through direct speech. Ælfric does not explicitly mention Cuthbert's foreknowledge at this point. On the contrary, he transforms Cuthbert's original direct speech into indirect speech and renders his warning in such general terms that the devil's temptation is put vaguely as *leasung* 'lying, falsehood' and buried in the embedded clause of purpose, hinting at no impending danger: 'cuðberhtus […] bodade. þæt hi wære wæron wið deofles syrwum. ðy læs ðe he mid leasunge heora geleafan awyrde. and fram ðære bodunge. heora mod abrude' ('Cuthbert […] preached that they should be wary of the devil's wiles, lest he should damage their faith with lying and draw their minds from the preaching'; ll. 113–16).[30] That Ælfric's Cuthbert was here actually warning against a foreseen illusion of fire is disclosed only at the end, when Ælfric uses the word *foresæde* 'predicted' in making the people, now ashamed of having disregarded the warning, refer to it and pray for Cuthbert's pardon in an indirect speech: 'biddende æt ðam lareowe. liðe miltsunge. þæt hi his lare ær to

[29] Godden, *Commentary*, p. 420, note on lines 97–112.

[30] The anonymous Life, for example, says more specifically: 'inludentis fantas iam predicens, […] ait […] si aliqua temptatio exorta foris repente extiterit, uos tamen stabiles estote' ('so foretelling the illusion of the deceiver, he said […]: "[…] if any temptation should suddenly arise outside, be steadfast" '; 88.2–4).

lyt gymdon. ða ða he ða fræcednysse him foresæde' ('praying the teacher for kind mercy for having heeded his teaching too little before, when he predicted the danger for them'; ll. 125–26). The verb in this last clause reveals that Cuthbert had foreseen and foretold the danger of the illusion; none of the *Vitae* has anything approaching this *ða ða* clause as a narrative technique of disclosing Cuthbert's foreknowledge. It should be added that the people's indirect speech in part ('hi […] gymdon') echoes the preceding authorial narrative ('hi ðære lare to lyt gymdon', l. 118), suggesting the manipulative use of speech on Ælfric's part, whereby the people are made to speak the same language and hold the same view of Christian truth as the narrator-homilist himself.

IV

Cuthbert the seer, who has emerged in two events during his monkhood, becomes a dominant theme in the subsequent part of Ælfric's life of the saint. This theme is accompanied by another development in his characterization which is also first seen clearly in this subsequent part: Cuthbert now speaks and acts with authority. It is in Cuthbert after he has moved to the island of Farne to live as a hermit that we find those two features combined to uncover a new figure of the saint. This new development demands a detailed examination, with a view to seeing how it is revealed through a series of miracles and events that take place on Farne.

The Farne section opens with what is one of the most renowned passages in the homily, describing the island amidst the sea to which Cuthbert is now determined to retire. It is noted largely for its alliterative style.[31] The heavy alliteration, reinforced by subjectless asyndetic parataxis for Cuthbert's actions and special diction for 'sea',[32] gives poetic heightening and tension to the passage, enhancing the representation of the island as a place of austere life and the determined asceticism of the man who will inhabit it. It is in this context that Cuthbert arrives as a man of power with whom the devils on the island do not dare to contend. In fact, the devils do not come into Ælfric's narrative of the scene. This absence is in part a feature of Ælfric's source text at this point, Bede's prose Life, where no conflict between Cuthbert and his foes takes place. But the prose Life gives at least some details of the 'wicked foe' with his demons and their oppressions, as in 'demorantium ibi phantasias demonum' ('the phantoms of demons who dwelt there'; 214.25–26) and 'omnia tela nequissimi ignea' ('all the fiery darts of the wicked one'; 214.28). Ælfric omits or shortens these, leaving almost nothing to mention about the devils except that they gave up the island entirely ('þæt igland. eallunge rymdon', l. 168) to the newcomer. Ælfric's Cuthbert is the 'æðela cempa' ('noble champion'; l. 168) without fighting against the 'ðeowracan. sweartra deofla' ('threats of the dark devils'; l. 167).

[31] For a discussion, see James Hurt, *Ælfric* (New York: Twayne, 1972), pp. 128–31.

[32] (Subjectless asyndetic parataxis) 'begann ða on mode […]; wolde ða […]; ferde ða to farne […]' ('began then in his mind […]; wished then […]; went then to Farne […]'; ll. 159–63); (diction for 'sea') 'on flowendre yðe […] mid sealtum brymme' ('in the flowing wave […] with the salt sea'; ll. 163–64). It may be relevant to note that this passage is given dense pointing on the manuscript, as in Godden's edition. On the basis of this, Hurt (*Ælfric*, pp. 128–29) arranges the passage in metrical lines to emphasize the alliterative and rhythmical scheme of 'rhythmical prose' in which it is written. Bredehoft (see n. 22) would see the pointing as evidence of verse writing here, as he does the pointing in the opening passages of the Cuthbert homily and another Second Series homily ('Ælfric and Late Old English Verse', pp. 77–78 and 97–98). Whether to be accepted as evidence of rhythmical prose or verse, the pointing in the opening of the Farne section and the poetic effects it implies endorse my view about the elevated use of language in the passage.

Inhabiting the place alone after the devils' retreat, Cuthbert now performs a succession of miracles through which his power is revealed. Remarkably, in his account of the first two miracles Ælfric uses the verb *het* 'commanded' in succession when describing the saint:

> *ÆCHom* II, 10.172 ac se halga wer. ða sona het. þa heardnesse. swiðe holian. onmiddan ðære flore. his fægeran botles. and ðær wæter æddre ða wynsum asprang. werod on swæcce. þam were to brice. se ðe hwilon wæter. to winlicum swæcce. wundorlice awende. ða ða hit wolde god; Se halga ða het. him bringan sæd. wolde on ðam westene. wæstmes tilian. gif hit swa geuðe. se ælmihtiga god. þæt he mid his foton. hine fedan moste; He seow ða hwæte. on beswuncenum lande. ac hit to wæstme. aspringan ne moste. ne furðon mid gærse. growende næs; Þa het he him bringan. bere to sæde. and ofer ælcne timan. ða eorðan aseow; Hit weox ða mid wynne. and wel geripode.
>
> (But the holy man then immediately commanded the hardness to be hollowed thoroughly in the middle of the floor of his fair dwelling, and there a pleasant water-source sprang up then, sweet in taste, for the use of the man, who once wonderfully turned water to wine-like taste when God willed it. The saint then ordered seed to be brought to him, wishing to labour to raise a crop in the waste, if Almighty God should grant it so, that he might feed himself with his feet. He then sowed wheat on tilled land, but it was not allowed to spring up to fruit, nor was it even growing with shoots. Then he commanded barley to be brought to him to sow and sowed the earth beyond any appropriate time. It then waxed joyfully and well ripened.)

In the anonymous Life and Bede's prose Life, in the first miracle Cuthbert has his monks dig into the rocky ground to find water (*VCA* 98.12–13; *VCP* 218.7), while in the verse Life he has no monks to assist him but succeeds in obtaining water by his prayers ('sanctus amoenam / Excutit insolita precibus dulcedine limpham'; 'by his prayers the saint sends forth water pleasant for its uncommon sweetness'; c. 16, 406–7). Ælfric's Cuthbert uses none of these expedients but just commands, like God in his Creation, and then 'ðær wæter æddre […] asprang'. The miraculous nature of the event is intensified by the abstract mode in which the command is made through the verb *het*. For one thing, the verb has no direct object denoting a person who is commanded, as a necessary result of the absence of any available monks in this narrative. More significant is Ælfric's use of the noun *heardnesse* 'hardness' as the direct object of the verb *holian* 'to hollow out', instead of a factual noun for the concrete object, such as *terram* in the anonymous Life ('fodite in medio pauimento domus meae hanc saxosam terram'; 'dig this rocky ground in the middle of the floor of my dwelling'; 98.7–8); Bede's prose Life has no expressed object of *fodiamus* 'let us dig'. Ælfric's preference for an abstract noun here seems deliberate in light of the two parallel expressions he uses in the neighbouring sentences: 'wæteres wynsumnysse' ('water's sweetness'; ll. 171–72) and 'winlicum swæcce' ('wine-like taste'; see above).[33] Ælfric's choice of language enhances his representation of Cuthbert's miraculous command and the power of the saint. The same mode of expression continues into the next miraculous episode in which he grows crops out of season. Where in Bede's prose Life Cuthbert asks his brethren first for tools and wheat and then for barley

[33] Ruth Waterhouse pays attention to the first two of these abstract nouns, saying with respect to the first that Ælfric 'chooses the noun "þa heardnesse" to stress the abstract quality of the conditions' (' "Wæter æddre asprang": How Cuthbert's Miracle Pours Cold Water on Source Study', *Parergon*, n. s., 5 (1987), 1–27 (p. 13)). But exactly what she means by this is not explained. Ælfric's preference for this kind of abstract expression may be compared with the Latin 'aequoreum […] frigus' ('watery cold'), as Bede puts it in the metrical *Vita* (c. 8, 230), describing the seals drying Cuthbert's body. Lapidge ('Bede's Metrical *Vita*', p. 92) calls this phrase 'suggestively abstract',

(220.15–22),[34] Ælfric's Cuthbert, as before, simply commands with a similar effect (in the last two lines above). The verb *het*, again as before, lacks any agent noun, granting the command a level of abstraction that has a similar elevating effect. By describing Cuthbert and his miracles in this way, Ælfric represents him as a man of absolute power, a type of Christ. It should be added that in the first miracle he reinforces this representation by echoing the biblical account of Christ's miracle at the wedding at Cana, most obviously when he refers (in the third line above) to the saint's own example of a similar miracle, implying that there is no wonder about the water miracle coming from such a saint.[35] The biblical echo is not original to Ælfric but comes from the verse Life ('qui quondam […] / In meracum latices valuit convertere nectar'; 'who at some time […] had the power to turn water into pure nectar'; c. 16, 411–12), which he translates almost verbatim.[36] But the successive use of the verb *het* and its abstract mode of expression are Ælfric's own addition, and his representation is all the more clear and effective.

Cuthbert as a man of authority continues to be a dominant theme in the next two miracles, both of which are wrought against ravens which persistently annoy him. Ælfric's characterization of the hermit saint is seen particularly clearly in the second of these miracles, when he recounts how Cuthbert banishes the birds for damaging his abode but forgives them when they come back repentant. The miracle is told in both Bede's verse and prose Lives. As Newlands has argued, the birds in the verse Life 'are banished for ever, "per aevum" (436). Such harsh words are not found in Bede's prose vita. Instead, true to Bede's prose characterization of Cuthbert as a kind, moderate man, the saint admonishes the ravens in gentler words'.[37] In this respect, Ælfric is closer to Bede in the verse Life. But Ælfric goes even further. His hermit banishes the birds 'mid ealle […] mid anum worde' ('entirely with one word'; ll. 193–94), where the verse Cuthbert is given two lines of direct speech to admonish the birds. The birds in turn are described as 'swearte hremmas' ('dark ravens'; l. 191), like those in the first miracle called 'wælhreowe fugelas' ('cruel birds'; l. 188). The attitude of the hermit (and the homilist Ælfric) towards the birds is expressed clearly by these affective terms;[38] the adjective *wælhreow* is Ælfric's own addition.

Ælfric's insistence on the austere hermit and his authority is no less obvious when the pair of birds come back with a token of repentance. Here Ælfric characteristically humanizes the birds:

> *ÆCHom* II, 10.194 Ac an ðæra fugela. eft fleogende com. ymbe ðry dagas. þearle dreorig. fleah to his foton. friðes biddende. þæt he on ðam lande. lybban moste. symle unscæððig. and his gefera samod; Hwæt ða se halga. him þæs geuðe. and hi lustbære. þæt land gesohten. and brohton ðam lareowe. lac to medes. swines rysl his scon to gedreoge. and hi ðær siððan. unscæððige wunedon.

seeing in it 'Bede's striving for abstract, generalized expression'.

[34] No monks appear in the verse Life, while the anonymous Life lacks the entire episode.

[35] Cuthbert's conversion of water into wine is given an independent account in a later chapter in the two prose *Vitae* (*VCA* lib. 4, c. 18; *VCP* c. 35).

[36] This echo in Bede is discussed in John C. Eby, 'Bringing the Vita to Life: Bede's Symbolic Structure of the Life of St. Cuthbert', *American Benedictine Review*, 48 (1997), 316–38 (p. 329). Waterhouse notes Ælfric's use of it (' "Wæter æddre asprang" ', p. 17).

[37] Newlands, 'Bede and Images', pp. 96–97.

[38] The phrase 'swearte hremmas' may be compared with 'sweartum gastum' ('dark spirits'; l. 165) and 'sweartra deofla' (l. 167; see p. 28), both referring to the devils on the island of Farne. On the other hand, Ælfric uses the phrase 'dark raven' for Elijah's raven ('ðone sweartan hremm', l. 105). But the symbolism Ælfric attaches to the word *sweart* seems obvious in context in the Farne passage being discussed. In contrast, Ælfric calls Cuthbert's apparently humble hermitage 'fair' ('his fægeran botles', l. 173).

> (But one of those birds came flying back after three days very sad, flew to his feet, asking for peace so that he might live in that land unharmful ever after, and his mate with him. Lo! then the holy man granted that to them, and they gladly sought that land and brought the teacher a gift as reward, swine's fat for the softening of his shoes, and they afterwards dwelt there unharmful.)

The raven who first came back alone begged pardon, lying at the saint's feet, not unlike a human penitent and quite unlike the raven in Bede's prose Life which uses 'quibus ualebat indiciis' ('such signs as it could'; 224.6) to pray for pardon. When the hermit accordingly gives remission, he does so with a verb of forgiving (*geuðe*) as in Bede's prose Life, and the term *lustbære* for the ravens may come from the verse Life ('ambo veniunt alacres'; 'both came back happy'; c. 18, 441). But the use of the two words together in contrast is original to Ælfric. Their combined use emphasizes the contrast between the two sides, the forgiving and the forgiven, enhancing the characterization of the saint as a hermit with absolute authority. It should be added that Ælfric's narrative obviously registers a contrast between the birds in the two miracles — those who came back repentant three days later and those who did not dare to do so. That may well be the reason why Ælfric emphatically says 'oðre twegen swearte hremmas' ('two other dark ravens'; ll. 190–91) in the second miracle, where the verse Life ('rescindunt corvi […] pactum'; 'the ravens rescind […] the agreement'; c. 18, 431) seems to imply that the birds in the two miracles are the same ones.[39]

These miracles are finally followed by one in which Cuthbert the seer emerges clearly, far more clearly than in the two events in his early life. Ælfric now for the first time in this homily calls the saint *se witega* 'the prophet' as he recounts the story of Ælfflæd the abbess's visit to the saint on Farne and the ensuing dialogue between the two (ll. 212–38). During the dialogue Cuthbert, prompted by the abbess's questions, makes his first public prophecies, regarding the demise of King Ecgfrith and the name of his successor, and further his own election as a bishop. It is at this last point that the saint is called *se witega*:[40]

> *ÆCHom* II, 10.231 Ða cwæð se witega þæt he wurðe nære. swa miccles hades. ne ðæs heahsetles. ac swa þeah nan man godes mihte ne forflihð. on nanum heolstrum. heofenan. oþþe eorðan. oþþe sæ ðriddan; Ic gelyfe swa ðeah. gif se ælmihtiga me hætt þæs hades beon. þæt ic eft mote ðis igland gesecan. æfter twegra geara ymbrene. and ðyses eðeles brucan; Ic bidde þe ælflæd. þæt ðu uncre spræce. on minum life. nanum ne ameldige.
>
> (The prophet then said that he was not worthy of so great an office, nor of the exalted seat, but, nevertheless, no man flees from God's power in any hiding-places of heaven or of earth or, thirdly, of sea. 'I believe, nevertheless, that if the Almighty commands me to be of that office, I shall be allowed to seek this island again after the course of two years and enjoy this homeland. I beg you, Ælfflæd, that you would not reveal our discourse to anyone during my life.')

As Ælfric starts the passage, the prophet's words are couched in indirect speech, heightened by the poetic 'heolstrum' and a succession of rhymes: 'hades […] heahsetles […] heofenan […]

[39] See Godden, *Commentary*, p. 423, note on lines 184–90.

[40] The word *witega* is used subsequently two more times: 'ðæs witegan word' (l. 290) and 'swa swa se witega cwæð' (l. 300), both in reference to a miracle the saint worked. The Latin equivalents *vates* and *propheta* are often used prior to the Farne passage in the verse Life. According to Newlands ('Bede and Images', pp. 103–4), in the verse Life the commonest word 'used to refer to Cuthbert is *vates* […], used 32 times in this poem of 979 lines', while 'the word *vates* is never used of Cuthbert' in Bede's prose Life, which uniquely describes the saint as *pater*; and the anonymous Life 'refers to the saint commonly as "homo Dei" […] and less commonly as "servus Dei/Domini" '.

eorðan […] ðriddan'.[41] Here many of the ideas are derived from the *Vitae*. Halfway through the saint's words, however, Ælfric suddenly switches to direct speech,[42] thereby giving the prophecy of his election and his subsequent retirement in two years the dramatic force and immediacy appropriate to what may be seen as a central point in the structure of the homily. The prophecy anticipates the rest of the homily both in content and structure. It provides much of the material that remains to be narrated in the homily and the structural framework for that narrative, which places the seer-saint at its centre. The word *witega*, introducing the prophecy in the first instance and then framing all that follows it, upholds the significance of this subsequent development of the homily. The details of this structuring will be discussed in the next section.

V

As the previous two sections have shown, Ælfric's narrative has its own structure. It is a structure that embodies the homilist's sense of Cuthbert's development as he changes, in the parts examined so far, from a youth who only learns the truth after the event, to a foreseeing monk and then a *witega*, who is also a man of power, as seen in the Farne section. How Ælfric continues to give a similar structured expression to his narrative in the subsequent part of the homily remains to be examined in this section. But before going into the analysis, we may as well have a look at an earlier part of the homily to see how Ælfric has already attempted to restructure the narratives of the *Vitae*. The method Ælfric employs there is rather local and not directly related to the larger framework we are going to discuss. However, it requires examination to help us understand the full nature of the narrative technique of the Cuthbert homily.

The earlier part that calls for attention is lines 97–157, which recount the stories of the miraculous feeding by the eagle and three other miracles in succession. Ælfric tells these four events in the same sequence as the *Vitae* but links them more closely. Thus, the second event, in which Cuthbert extinguishes an illusory fire the devil creates before a crowd of people (see above, p. 27), is presented as occurring after the saint eating the meal provided by the eagle ('ða æfter gereorde'; 'then after the meal'; l. 113) and hence on the same day and during the same preaching journey. The *Vitae*, on the other hand, are all vague about the sequence of the two events, with no clearer link between them than, for example, 'eodem tempore' ('at the same time') used to introduce the second event in Bede's prose Life (198.3). This event in turn is linked thematically, in Ælfric's narrative, to a similar story about the saint standing in front of a fire, which immediately follows, using the phrase *swa ðeah* 'however', implying 'another fire, though not a phantom but a real fire this time' — a verbal link that Æfric adds in place of the looser sequence in the *Vitae*.

Æfric then makes a larger adaptation to the sequence of the four events. Where all of the *Vitae* move directly to the last of the events, Ælfric instead inserts a 'brief intervening

[41] See Roberta Frank, 'Poetic Words in Late Old English Prose', in *From Anglo-Saxon to Early Middle English: Studies Presented to E. G. Stanley*, ed. by M. Godden, D. Gray and T. Hoad (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994), 87–107 (pp. 104–5). Of the five rhyming words, the last (*ðriddan*) is Ælfric's own addition to the verse Life ('caeli terraeve marisve latebris'; 'in the hiding-places of heaven or earth or sea'; c. 21, 529).

[42] I discuss in detail the transition from indirect to direct speech in this passage in 'Ælfric's Shifting Mode of Speech: Postscript on *Wite Ge* in the Peter and Paul Homily', *Studies in English Literature* (Tokyo), English Number, 54 (2013), 1–10.

comment on Cuthbert's preaching [which] is perhaps based on an earlier chapter found only in VCP c. 9' and which 'is oddly placed in Ælfric's version, in the middle of a sequence of miracle stories'.[43] Godden's remark that 'possibly it marks the end of a sequence of events associated with Cuthbert's preaching expeditions'[44] seems to give a convincing explanation for the rearrangement, bringing to light an aspect of Ælfric's method of restructuring the narratives. In terms of the story itself, one may note that the last of the four events is a story about a woman whose husband, when asking for the saint's help, would have liked to conceal her madness, though the saint had already seen the circumstances of her condition. Ælfric accordingly places the focus on the saint's foresight by using much the same wording in the authorial narrative ('Cuðberhtus […] cwæð þæt se deofol […] forlætan sceolde. and mid micelre fyrhte aweg fleon'; 'Cuthbert […] said that the devil […] should […] leave her and flee away in great fright'; ll. 149–52) and the wife's report after being healed ('cydde hu se deofol. hi dearnunge forlet. and swiðe forhtigende. fleames cepte'; 'reported how the devil secretly left her and, greatly fearing, took flight'; ll. 155–56). He makes a similar manipulative use of language when he refers, in corresponding terms, to how the saint predicts about the wife and how the healed wife behaves (ll. 152–54), and inserts the phrase 'be ðæs lareowes wordum' ('in accordance with the teacher's words') to emphasize the correspondence. Such an emphasis on the saint's foresight may be an early expression of the theme which is subsequently seen more clearly to be central to the structuring of the *vita* as a whole.

To return to this larger structure, its thematic centre is, as I suggested above, Cuthbert as a seer and man of authority, a theme which continues to sustain much of the narrative subsequent to the Farne section. The passage that immediately follows it (ll. 239–58) is an account of how the three public prophecies he made on Farne came true. Ælfric first gives a full account of the saint's promotion to bishopric of Lindisfarne, recounting how the King and other high representatives of the church and the state unanimously elected and persuaded him to accept the office and how the saint at last agreed to do so very reluctantly. Ælfric says that all this had long been predicted by the God-sent boy and Bishop Boisil, though he never mentions the bishop elsewhere in his narrative. However, his main aim in this passage is to relate these events to the saint's prophecies made on Farne in the immediately preceding passage. Ælfric brings this relation emphatically into focus by framing the passage verbally, saying 'æfter ðisum wordum' ('after these words') referring to the saint's prophecies at the opening and 'þa wæs gefylled. seo foresæde spræc. swa se halga wer. sæde þam mædene' ('then the prophetic speech was fulfilled, as the holy man had said to the maiden') at the end, with the *swa* clause referring back again to the saint's prophesying. These phrases are absent in the *Vitae*; Ælfric's narrative frame clearly reflects the intention to emphasize the events as a fulfillment of a prophecy rather than to give a chronological account. To reinforce this frame, Ælfric makes a slight but important change in the details. Unlike Bede, who places it a year or so after in his *Vitae* (*VCM* c. 21, 545; *VCP* 238.21), Ælfric represents King Ecgfrith's death and his brother's succession as taking place in the same year as the election ('on ðam ylcan geare', l. 252), making the saint's prophecy and its fulfillment more immediately and dramatically related. His opening phrase, 'æfter ðisum wordum', itself points to this intention, since it apparently locates the events it introduces more closely together in time than Bede's 'nec multo post' ('not long afterwards'; *VCP* 238.4) and its equivalents in the other *Vitae* (*VCA*

[43] Godden, *Commentary*, p. 421, note on lines 131–36.
[44] Godden, *Commentary*, p. 421, note on lines 131–36.

110.2; *VCM* c. 21, 536). All these adaptations stress the overall narrative structure into which Ælfric recasts the three events. It is also important to note that the frame, with the closing *swa* clause affirming the fulfillment, represents a new pattern, succeeding the earlier two, in Ælfric's narrative of miracles; this is soon to become the standard pattern for the subsequent narrative, as we shall see.

Adaptations along the same lines are made in much of the subsequent narrative of the miracles the saint works when he was a bishop. In the story of a half-dead boy whom he heals, Ælfric omits much of the circumstantial detail given by Bede but instead ends the story with a firm statement that his prophecy was fulfilled ('ðæs witegan word. wurdon gefyllede'; 'the prophet's words were fulfilled'; ll. 290–91), bringing into focus the saint and his power of foresight. Again, in the story of the second dialogue with Ælfflæd, when questioned about his curious behaviour at the meal, the saint is described as answering that he has just seen the death of a certain man in her monastery and prophesies that the man's name will be made known to her the next morning, instead of being made known to him by her, as in all of the *Vitae* (*VCA* 126.14–15; *VCM* c. 31, 669–71; *VCP* 262.29–30). One feels inclined to ask if Ælfric might possibly be implying that the saint knows who the dead was when he tells the abbess about him, so great is his power as a seer. At any rate, Ælfric does not forget to extol the saint's power by saying at the end of the story that the truth then became widely known just as he had prophesied ('hit wearð ða gewidmærsod. swa swa se witega cwæð', ll. 300–1).

The last of the passages in which Cuthbert the seer is central to the narrative is found towards the end of the homily in an account of the deaths of the saint and his disciple Hereberht (ll. 308–31). Here Ælfric makes the most drastic rearrangement, omitting most of the events between the two deaths that occur in widely separated chapters in the *Vitae*. In the fullest account given by Bede in the prose Life, for example, Chapter 28 describes the saint meeting Hereberht and telling him about his own death which he had foreseen, followed by the latter's plea to be allowed to die on the same day and his subsequent departure granted after a long illness. The chapter is followed by further miracles and stories of the saint's last days after he returns to Farne, before he dies in Chapter 39. Ælfric omits this intervening material, moving some of it to an earlier point in the narrative, in order to represent the deaths of the two literally as a continued story, almost as one death — an intention which is expressed symbolically and beautifully by the phrase 'swiðe onette' (l. 324), literally meaning 'greatly hastened', referring to the saint hurrying back to Farne to await what is now described as his own impending death. These rearrangements show a clear sense of structure, leading to 'a moving conclusion' to the story.[45]

Ælfric's rearrangement of the story of Cuthbert's death in the *Vitae* is so obvious that it has attracted the attention of much previous study. Jones, for example, argues that Ælfric's final third section, where the saint is primarily a seer, 'loses the variety of miracles at the time of and subsequent to Cuthbert's death: the concern is with the death itself'.[46] Similarly, Hurt discusses Ælfric's omissions of the material in the *Vitae* from a structural point of view, saying that they 'are chiefly in the last sections of the life, where Bede's narrative is structurally weakest. […] Ælfric's treatment of Cuthbert's death is structurally quite independent of Bede's prose life'.[47] Both are right as far as their comparison of Ælfric and Bede goes. But neither of

[45] Godden, *Commentary*, p. 429, note on lines 308–22.

[46] Jones, 'Ælfric's Life', p. 40.

[47] J. R. Hurt, 'Ælfric and the English Saints' (unpublished PhD. dissertation, Indiana University, 1965), pp. 67–68. See also Gretsch, *Ælfric and the Cult*, p. 106.

them notes that Ælfric's 'independent' structure in this part of the narrative hinges on Cuthbert the seer whose foresight it is designed to highlight. The saint first foresees his own death. This may be nothing singular in hagiographical narratives. What is unique to Ælfric's narrative is that the saint foresees that through the grace of God he and his disciple are to be granted their wish. When Hereberht makes his plea anxiously, the saint kindly responds to it and reassures him with his foresight: 'se biscop. his cneowa gebigde. to ðissere bene. mid bliðum mode. and syððan ðone sacerd. sona gefrefrode. cwæð þæt him geuðe. se ælmihtiga wealdend. þæt hi ætsomne. siðian moston' ('the bishop bent his knees to this prayer with cheerful mind, and then immediately comforted the priest, saying that the Almighty Ruler had granted them that they might depart together'; ll. 317–20). Significantly, the saint does not pray to God here. Ælfric represents Cuthbert as confident in God's mercy without praying for it, unlike the saint in the *Vitae*, who prays before he knows that their request has been granted (*VCA* 124.19; *VCM* c. 30, 650; *VCP* 250.14). The material in the *Vitae* is severely pruned in Ælfric's narrative as detailed above in order to focus on this foreseeing scene, particularly the saint as its centre. Ælfric reinforces this image of the seer-saint by ending the story with a statement, in what is now his usual narrative pattern, confirming the relevance of the saint's foresight: the saint 'to drihtne gewat. and hereberhtus samod […] swa swa hi […] ær geleornodon. þurh godes gast' ('departed to the Lord, and Hereberht with him […], just as they had learnt before […] through the spirit of God'; ll. 329–31).

Representing Cuthbert's foresight in this way, Ælfric also emphasizes the saint as a man specially elected by God, who has a special relationship to God; his promise to Hereberht may even be seen 'like Christ's to the repentant thief', as Jones argues.[48] The emphasis on this aspect of the story makes the passage a fitting conclusion to the *vita* of the saint who is described as coeternal with God in both the opening and closing lines (see below). That might also explain why Ælfric apparently felt little need to elaborate on the post-mortem miracles; he summarizes the profuse material for this in the *Vitae* briefly in a few lines (ll. 331–38) before going on to the doxology.

VI

Ælfric's homily on St Cuthbert has been studied primarily for the author's incipient rhythmical prose, and its other aspects have not been granted the full examination they deserve. This essay has focused on the structure of this hagiographical homily and the narrative techniques that sustain it. As I have shown in the previous sections, Ælfric's life of Cuthbert has a structure that, though differently conceived than in the preceding *Vitae*, is clearly demonstrable and deserves appreciation in its own right. In this regard, Ælfric's *vita* differs from the anonymous Life and Bede's verse Life, which, as the previous studies have shown, are 'static' and use little structuring. It is more like the 'developmental' prose Life by Bede.[49] But Ælfric structures the development in his own way, seeing it primarily as the protagonist's progress to a seer-saint, from a lay youth who does not know the truth until after the event, to a foreseeing monk and then a seer, a 'witega', who is 'wis ðurh witegunge. wisdomes gastes' ('wise through prophecy of the spirit of wisdom'; l. 307) and makes his first public prophecies while a solitary on Farne and continues to dominate the subsequent narrative. The development itself and most of the

[48] Jones, 'Ælfric's Life', pp. 40–41.

[49] See the second section, p. 21.

details Ælfric uses to illustrate it are in the preceding *Vitae*. Ælfric, however, gives a new form to the development, deploying a narrative method and linguistic usage to register his sense of structure, and reveals the development more emphatically than the preceding versions do. Central to this new form are the three successive patterns Ælfric uses in recounting miracles and Cuthbert's changing perceptions of them. The last of the three, emphasizing Cuthbert the *witega* by starting the account with the saint's own words of prophecy and closing it with authorial words of affirmation that it came to pass as he had prophesied, becomes the standard pattern for the later part of the narrative, as in the saint's first public prophecies made on Farne, and the story of the saint's death, where Ælfric drastically prunes and rearranges the individual events told in the *Vitae* and creates a memorable ending of his *vita*.

Cuthbert's development as Ælfric recounts it with changing narrative patterns is accompanied by other features which reflect it. Most prominent of these is the emphasis Ælfric places on the saint as a man of power, speaking and acting with authority — a figure which first takes shape in the first episodes of the Farne section in conjunction with the emergence of the saint as *witega* later in the same section. Remarkably, Ælfric intensifies the representation with a biblical echo and the thematic use of language, notably using an expression of commanding rather than asking, as used in the *Vitae*, in order to describe the saint as a type of Christ. The representation takes a slightly varied form in the story of the deaths of the saint and his disciple, where the saint is represented as a man with a special relationship to God, who is allowed to know, without praying to God, that their wish has been granted. All these features reinforce the successive narrative patterns Ælfric deploys and his structuring of the *vita* they are used to uphold.

Significantly, all this development is ultimately a development that embodies the preordained sanctity the protagonist is blessed with in the *vita*. Ælfric treats this aspect in the earliest part of the narrative, particularly in the first episode, following the *Vitae* in the main. What is Ælfric's own is the opening lines of the homily he adds prior to the narrative, where he describes the saint as living in the present tense and emphasizes his oneness with God (see the second section). This opening has a closing counterpart in the final doxology, which matches it both in intent and language: 'sy wuldor and lof. þam welegan drihtne. se ðe his gecorenan. swa cystelice wurðað. æfter deadlicum life. mid him lybbende .a. on ecnysse. ealra worulda. amen:—' ('glory and praise be to the prosperous Lord, who so generously honours his chosen one after mortal life, living with him forever for all eternity. Amen'; ll. 339–41). Like the opening, the doxology describes the two living together, though it is God here who reigns in the present tense and honours the saint, 'his gecorenan', living with him for all eternity. The opening affirms oneness by focusing on the saint, as appropriate to the introduction to a hagiography; the doxology focuses on God, as appropriate to the ending of a homily. Taken together, they emphasize the saint's special status with God. Within this framework of the homily, the saint develops, within the *vita*, from his earliest youth to his last day in this world. The saint is in progress in one sense and yet is one with God from the outset in another sense. This double structure Ælfric gives his homily is obviously a result of the adaptation of the hagiographical material to a preaching purpose. Seen, however, in the larger context of what Godden has elucidated as Ælfric's 'experiments in genre', it may also be part of the answer the homilist has reached in this piece of the *Catholic Homilies* in his experiments with the form of

[50] For a convincing explanation of this later development, see Godden, 'Experiments in Genre', pp. 277–82.

hagiography, before finally moving on to a more distinct form of separation of the homiletic discourse from the narrative in the *Lives of Saints*.[50]

There is another sense in which the Cuthbert homily can be considered in a wider context. If, as I have shown above, Ælfric's telling has produced a 'developmental' saint's life in this homily, how does it fit with what he does with other saints in the *Catholic Homilies* and the *Lives of Saints*? The 'developmental' life of Cuthbert appears to be far removed from, for instance, the treatment in another Second Series homily on St Martin (*ÆCHom* II, 34), though the protagonist here too develops, from a heathen soldier to a devout man of prayer and from a monk to a bishop who foresees his own death.[51] How would this apparent variation in narrative style (and other ones that may possibly be brought to light) be related to Ælfric's changing attitude to hagiographical writing and/or the individual Latin sources he draws upon and the way he rewrites them? And how can it be related to trends in Anglo-Saxon hagiography more generally? These questions remain to be pursued in understanding the history of the genre in the period. That eventual understanding may reinforce the results of my present study, emphasizing the position of the Cuthbert homily both as an important subject of study in its own right and as a point in Ælfric's changing attitude to hagiography and the development of his narrative styles.

[51] I have discussed Ælfric's Martin homily in comparison with his later telling of the saint in the *Lives of Saints*, in '*Sententia* in Narrative Form: Ælfric's Narrative Method in the Hagiographical Homily on St Martin', *Leeds Studies in English*, n. s., 42 (2011), 75–92.